

Transcript July 19th

Welcome by Nick Bird

Welcome to our service for the 19th July, brought to you from the Benefice of Rural East York. My name is Nick Bird and I'm so pleased that you can join us. It has been good to hear from people this week, some of whom join us from as far away as South Africa!

Our preacher today is my friend and colleague The Revd Keith Albans, who is our Methodist Minister in this area, and I am delighted that he can be here with us.

In the midst of all that is happening in the world around us, and all that might disturb our peace, it is good to gather to offer worship, to pause, to pray and reflect, and to acknowledge that, whatever else is going on, 'surely the Lord is in this place!'

Thoughts by Mark

On the 23rd March 2020, life as we knew it, changed dramatically. A deadly virus became a global pandemic and threatened to sweep across our nation demanding that drastic measures needed to be implemented with an unprecedented urgency the like of which has not been witnessed for many generations. Words and phrases such as 'Stay at home,' 'stay safe,' 'shield,' 'social distancing,' 'help save lives' became not only common currency, but a way of life. Suddenly, roads and streets, towns and cities became desolate. All but the essential shops and businesses closed. Church buildings closed their doors. Connection, community and communion with one another as we knew it was severed. Our freedom became diminished and our world looked very different. Many of us looked within and called out, 'Surely, the Lord is in this place?'

Prayer and Kyrie

Father, for the thoughts and deeds that have not been pleasing to you.

Lord have Mercy

Lord have Mercy

Jesus, for the words spoken without thought

Christ have Mercy

Christ have Mercy

Spirit of God, search me and know my heart and my anxious thoughts and see if there is any offensive way in me.

Lord have Mercy

Lord have Mercy

May the God of love

bring us back to himself,

forgive us our sins,

and assure us of his eternal love

in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Psalm 139:1-6

- 1 You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Song: Blessed Be Your Name

Matt Redman

1. Blessed Be Your Name
in the land that is plentiful,
where Your streams of abundance flow,
blessed be Your name.

*“Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your glorious name.”*

2. Blessed Be Your name
when I'm found in the desert place'
though I walk through the wilderness'
blessed Be Your name.

*“Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your glorious name.”*

*Every blessing You pour out I'll
turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord,
still I will say,*

*You give and take away,
You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say,
“Lord, blessed be Your name.”*

*“Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your glorious name.”*

*You give and take away,
You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say,
“Lord, blessed be Your name.”*

3. Blessed be Your name
when the sun's shining down on me,
when the world's 'all as it should be',
blessed be Your name.

*You give and take away,
You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say,
“Lord, blessed be Your name.”*

4. Blessed be Your name
on the road marked with suffering,
though there's pain in the offering,
blessed be Your name.

*“Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your glorious name.”*

*Every blessing You pour out I'll
turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord,
still I will say,*

*“Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
blessed be Your glorious name.”*

Blessed be Your name

Thought - Mark

The virus has had, and continues to have, an undeniably profound and lasting impact. Sickness, suffering and pain; sadness, sorrow, loss and grief; disappointment, anxiety and anguish; loneliness, isolation and despair; uncertainty, lack of control and fear; poverty, deprivation and hopelessness.; questioning, doubt and a shaking of confidence. There isn't one life that has not been touched in some way. And once again, we look within and call out, 'Surely the Lord is in this place?'

Psalm 139 New International Version (NIV)

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

Readings read by Pamela, Carole and Colin

Genesis 28:10-19a

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Romans 8:12-25 New International Version (NIV)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Present Suffering and Future Glory

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Homily by Keith Albans

Gen 28¹⁶ “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!”

One of my favourite pieces of Old Testament logic comes in Joshua chapter 4. After crossing the Jordan, twelve stones are set up in Gilgal. And why? Simply so that in years to come children will ask their parents why the stones are there! A bit like tying a knot in your hanky in the hope that you will remember something – even if you’re not sure what it is.

Jacob similarly sets up a stone in today’s OT story – it’s the one he’d used as a pillow at the place he had his ladder dream. And as he makes his dramatic declaration that God is in this place, the pillow becomes a pillar which he anoints with oil and names the place Bethel – the house of God.

When we lived in Heworth in the 1980’s we had a cat – Big Thana (named after a eunuch in the book of Esther). He would happily walk with us round towards Church, but he always stopped at the last house. This far but no further – we had reached the end of his territory – but two hours later as we walked home, he was still there, waiting for us. In many ways the stories of the Old Testament include a series of discoveries about the extent of the divine territory – of where God is willing to be encountered.

Mountains form a common thread of God’s topography – Abraham and Moses both show us that. But in a land marked by the deep scar of the Dead Sea, the depths also show God’s presence. In Psalm 130, the Psalmist isn’t convinced, and rather assumes God’s absence – “Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord, Lord hear my voice!” But a few verses later, the writer is reassured and his waiting is rewarded and he knows God is with him, even in the depths.

Height and depth – sorted. But what about reach? Again, a problem at first, particularly for the people in exile. What's the point of singing the songs of Zion in a strange land? God can't hear us... Rather like Jonah assuming that if he sailed to Spain, he's be out of God's sight... but for both Jonah and the exiles, experience proved otherwise, and the encounter with God and the awareness of God's all-pervading presence takes hold... And in Psalm 139, the impossibility of falling out of God's presence is celebrated, alongside God's absolute and intimate knowledge of us. All of which is wonderful, and important to proclaim and have at the heart of our spiritual memory bank.

But it doesn't mean it always feels like that does it. One of things people have done since the times of Jacob and Joshua is to make those stone pillars into places of pilgrimage, then add a shrine where offerings could be made, and then add a building where services could be held. Special places where God is known to be present and can be met. Just the sort of places we have been prevented from meeting one another and from meeting God for these four long months... And for all that we've been creative in putting our online services together, and perhaps via Zoom we have enjoyed looking at people's faces instead of the backs of their heads, it does lack the sense of the numinous doesn't it – as far removed from the vision of Isaiah 6 with trains filling temples as can be imagined...

And yet... and yet... it is precisely that deprivation which has led us and perhaps enabled us to discover, with Jacob, that God is in places we'd never have imagined – and that is pretty awesome.

I am not designed for caving... but about 25 years ago when I was living in Sheffield a group from my Church were going into one of the publicly accessible caves in the Peak District – and I went. Contorting the body to negotiate narrow squeezes was interesting – and I surprised myself and a few others. But I chose to opt out of the final one and stayed on my own while the rest of the party went on. And I turned my head lamp off, and there I was in total absolute darkness, all alone... it was amazing, and the Lord was in that place.

I wonder where you may have had similar realisations – particularly in these past weeks? I sense God's presence most strongly in places which take me out of myself – big waterfalls, crashing waves, wide vistas, clear night skies... those places are awesome!

Celtic spirituality speaks of thin places – meaning places which feel as though they belong as much to the realm of heaven as they do to that of earth. Thin places can also speak of times when we are living on rations, unable to access the normal sources of spiritual nourishment on which we usually rely. In his account of being held hostage for 5 years in Lebanon, Terry Waite writes of drawing on what was within him – his religious memory bank – in order to maintain his sense of who he was as a person loved by God, even in the awfulness of solitary confinement. Our current confinements may be solitary, albeit in very different conditions, but the memories of meeting God in familiar places can similarly sustain us in the unfamiliar circumstances of Covid19 lockdown.

Writing to the Church in Rome, Paul doesn't try to underplay the nature of the difficult times in which they were living. Rather he recognises that such difficulties are part of the imperfect in-between times in which we live, and he offers us the hope and reassurance that God is active and present within creation, working to bring about that which is yet to be... and his word to them, and to us, is to wait with patience...

In my last job I was a frequent user of Premier Inn's hotels. In the rooms there was always one of those surveys to fill in, and they seemed particularly keen to have your feedback on their pillows... I wonder how Jacob would have responded! "A bit hard at first... but I must

have slept well because I had a fantastic dream – ladders, angels and divine promises of land and descendants beyond number. It was awesome – surely the Lord was in this place!” Not sure what the management would make of that.

Wherever we are sharing in this service, and wherever this next week may take us, may we know that we are and we will be on holy ground – for God’s promised presence will be with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Song: Be still for the presence of the Lord

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy one, is here.
Come, bow before him now,
with reverence and fear.
In Him no sin is found,
we stand on Holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy one, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire,
with splendor He is crowned.
How awesome is the sight,
our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
He comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister His grace.
No work too hard for Him,
in faith receive from Him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

Intercessions

‘The Lord is in this place’

You may like to join in with this exclamation in between our intercessions, coined by Jacob on awakening from his dream.

Almighty and everlasting God, we come before you in prayer, knowing our need of you and expressing our thanks for your beautiful creation which we must love and cherish your works are wonderful- we know that full well.

'The Lord is in this place'

We pray at this time for your world and its peoples with all their various needs, for those whose lives are devastated by war and who suffer homelessness and starvation and we give thanks that your love is able to reach out to them through the selfless efforts of those who work with the many charities throughout your world.

'The Lord is in this place'

We pray especially for those whose lives have been affected by the pandemic corona virus. For those who have lost loved ones in the face of this relentless affliction and for those whose lives have been blighted by the knock-on economic effects. At the same time we give praise and thanks for the tireless efforts of doctors, nurses, carers and other essential frontline workers. We have witnessed your love in so many acts of heroism and dedication.

'The Lord is in this place'

We pray for the scientists, whose wisdom and commitment give us hope that a cure may be found in the not-too distant future. Give strength to their efforts, Lord, and reward for their dedication. We also ask that you give wisdom to our politicians helping to discern a safe path towards the return of normal life throughout the world. Normal life which we must never again take for granted in forgetting your love for us set in your wonderful creation.

'The Lord is in this place'

We pray for our own church throughout the benefice, and we give thanks for all who lead and inspire our worship even in the face of disease imposed limitations, we are grateful Lord that we have been able to share in the internet services so skilfully put together for our delight, but look forward fervently to being able to share your word and worship in our churches together once again.

'The Lord is in this place'

Let us share a moment of silence together as we bring before God those known only to ourselves, we pray for those who are in distress, who face sickness, pain and confusion at this time, for those who have recently been bereaved by the loss of a love one, and we pray that, like them may gain faith and hope in the life to come. Let all who grieve face God's love as we name them in our hearts.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Song: The Lord's my shepherd

1 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone.
And I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

2 He guides my ways in righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.

Refrain

3 And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.

Refrain

Thought - Mark

'Surely the Lord is in this place.....?' The Lord is surely here..... For as sure as day follows night, as spring follows winter, as harvest follows sowing.....as resurrection follows death, the Lord is surely in this place. Through the barrenness of the wilderness, through the ravages of the storm, through the darkness of the night, through times like these, our God has never left us. Our God never leaves us. Our God will always be with us. This is the sure hope of our faith. And this living, loving eternal hope of the presence of God is all around us. In every child painted rainbow, in every community clap, in every neighbourly act of kindness, in every Foodbank Food parcel, in every creative act of online worship, in times like these, the Spirit of God is alive, pulsing with hope, brimming with promise and overflowing with the eternal love of Christ. Surely, the Lord is, in this place.

Collect:

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love toward you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Blessing

May you be blessed by the presence of angels
who disturb your peace and dispel your fears.
May you be blessed by the surprise of the Divine
whose absence may be disproven by God's voice beside you.
May you be accompanied on your journey
by the unseen One,
who is with you and keeps you
wherever you may go.
And may the God of sweet and fiery love,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
bless and protect you,
and bring you home.
Amen.